



In conjunction with National Water Week, INL co-sponsors the annual Water Festival to teach thousands of fifth- and sixth-graders about the complex issues surrounding water supply and demand.

## Annual Water Festival prepares the next generation to preserve

By [Rebecca Jones](#), *INL Communications & Governmental Affairs*

Holding an educational, daylong event dedicated to the importance of preserving water might seem unnecessary on a planet that is 70 percent water, and in a state that has more than 500,000 acres of lakes, reservoirs and rivers — one of the most water-rich in the country. But when you consider that less than 1 percent of the resource is usable drinking water, and Idaho's agricultural industry leads the state by using 19.5 billion gallons of fresh water each day, the annual Water Festival in Idaho Falls is an essential component for preparing the next generation to protect the precious basic resource.

To help educate young students on the complex issues surrounding water supply and demand, Idaho National Laboratory helped sponsor the Water Festival in conjunction with National Water Week. The May 13 event allowed nearly 1,000 local students in fifth and sixth grades to broaden their understandings of water beyond an expectation when they turn the tap.



**Idaho Falls Water Superintendent David Richards teaches students about water contamination through a series of blindfolded taste tests.**



**Listen to the [Water Festival podcast](#) or read the [transcript](#).**

"It is a precious commodity, especially in these last few years, as you can see with global climate change or drought," said INL drinking water specialist and Water Festival presenter Brad Andersen. He hopes that students will "have more appreciation for water, and understand that it doesn't grow on trees like leaves. That we need to take care of our drinking water; we need to protect it; we need to be water wise."

Event organizers work to show students that water is much more than a mundane material. For 14 years, they have brought the resource alive for students, showing them how it can create energy, nurture the ecosystem and require careful coordination for safe public consumption. They hope that understanding the complex uses and needs of water will encourage the students to be better stewards.

Organizer Flint Hall from [Idaho's Department of Environmental Quality](#) explained, "Our goal for this event is to impress upon these students the importance of water to our everyday life and to our future. We hope to be part of equipping them to be the informed environmental decision-makers we need so that their children will also be able to enjoy clean and abundant water resources in eastern Idaho."

To help these students embrace their role as the future influence on the water supply, the event gives students more information on everything from how to avoid drinking contaminated water to what kinds of insects live in water. Stations at the festival showcased the complexity of water. INL's station allowed students to play Water Jeopardy and highlighted Idaho water facts. One station allowed the students to build rain sticks. Another had students running a relay race that represented ways they can protect the watershed while hiking and camping. In addition to all of this, students toured the Gem State Power Plant to see how water is used to create the energy they use in their homes.

Andersen hopes that this event also highlights future career options. "A lot of people think about going in and becoming doctors, lawyers, engineers, but they need a lot of people in the water and waste-water field to run our water systems for our cities. And there are good jobs, and good skilled jobs for them."



**INL's Brad Andersen, right, emcees a game of Water Jeopardy for eastern Idaho fifth- and sixth-grade students.**

While the festival brings in a significant number of students, organizers extend the impact of National Water Week efforts beyond those who are able to make a field trip to the event. In addition to the daylong festival, organizers distribute educational materials on water to more than 3,100

students in eastern Idaho, provide curriculum supplements for teachers and hold a Water Awareness Week poetry contest.

Ultimately, the Water Festival gives students an interactive chance to learn about protecting a necessary natural commodity. But for the students, the best part may be walking away from a fun and educational day. As one student explained, "Well, I learned what water plants actually did, like use water to make energy for lights and air conditioning. I learned how 70 percent of the water is used in a garden compared to the water we use in a house. And I had a lot of fun."

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